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Contents >> Environmental Issues in the ACT: Behaviour of ACT Households - Feb 2006

Environmental Issues in the ACT: Behaviour of ACT Households

This article discusses recently released ABS data analysis on household views and practices in relation to selected environmental issues – for the ACT and Australia more broadly. The data was released in Environmental Issues: Peoples Views and Practices (cat. no. 4602.0), issued in respect of March 2005. The emphasis is on household behaviour that affects energy use and loss, and views towards the Green Power Scheme and willingness to use it.

Some main findings

Some of the more interesting findings of the survey are as follows:

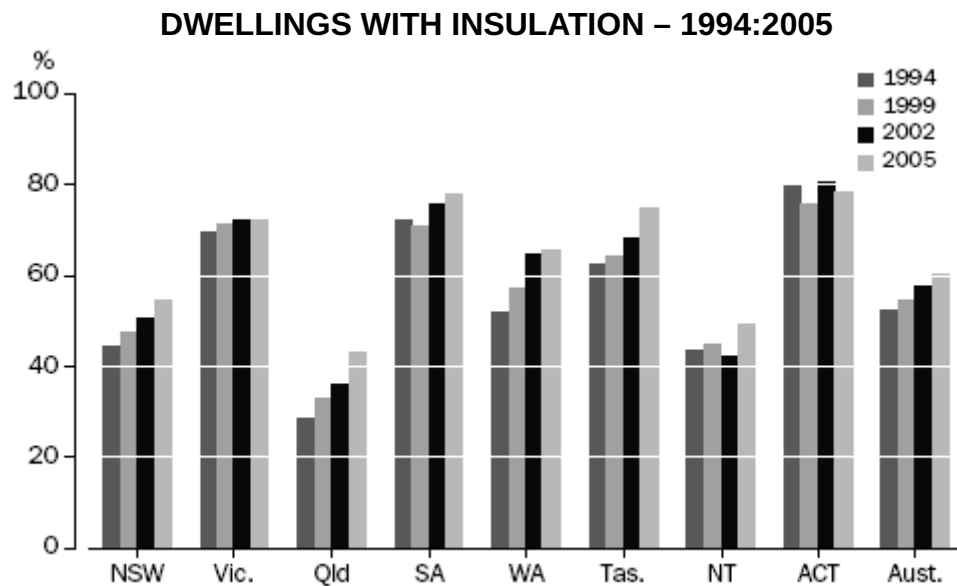
- Comfort, rather than cost saving or using less energy was the main reason that ACT households installed insulation in their dwellings.
- Utilisation of energy saving lights (other than fluorescent) by ACT households, rose 8 percentage points between March 2002 and March 2005.
- Gas usage as a source of energy in dwellings increased from 64% in 2002 to 71% of ACT households in 2005, well above the national figure of 58%.
- Popularity of front loading washing machines (20%) among ACT households, was the highest of all states and territories.
- Awareness of Green Power schemes was higher in the ACT than for all other states or territories that use the schemes, with 49% of households aware of the schemes. However the proportion of ACT households willing to pay extra for green power has dropped over time, from 34% at March 2002 to 23% at March 2005.

Dwelling Characteristics

Most dwelling structures in the ACT (77%) were of brick veneer construction, whilst 18% were of double brick construction. The ACT had the highest proportion of dwellings with insulation (79%); above the national figure of 61%. The proportion of ACT dwellings with insulation has not changed significantly since June 1994 (80%). Of those ACT dwellings with insulation, the majority had insulation installed in the roof or ceiling (99%). Forty-four percent had insulation installed in the walls.

The main type of insulation used in the roof or ceiling was batts (80%), followed by loose fill rock wool insulation (8%). The use of insulation batts has increased 10 percentage points since March 1999 whilst the use of rock wool has remained relatively constant over the same period. At March 2005, 75% of ACT households reported that the main reason for installing insulation in their dwellings was to achieve comfort. This was well above the number of ACT households that reported cost saving on energy bills or using less energy as their main reason for installing

insulation.



Lighting

In March 2005, 46% of dwellings in the ACT had fluorescent lighting, down 9 percentage points from 1999 (55%). Fluorescent lighting usage in the ACT was 11 percentage points lower than the national figure of 57%. For other energy saving lights, usage in the ACT (35%) was slightly higher than for Australia (33%), and 9 percentage points higher than in 2002. At March 2005, 9% of ACT households lit their whole house with fluorescent or other energy saving lights. This was similar to the figure reported for all Australian households (10%), but well below that reported by Northern Territory households (21%).

Gas as an Energy Source in ACT Dwellings

Gas is the second most important source of energy for Australian households and was used in more than half (58%) of all households in March 2005. In the ACT, 71% of households used gas in 2005, a 6 percentage point increase since 2002 (64%) and above the national figure (58%). Gas was used by 32% of ACT households for cooking – this was consistent with the national figure.

Heaters and Coolers

At March 2005, 70% of ACT dwellings had one heating unit in use, 18% had two, and 12% had three or more. The main type of heating used in ACT dwellings was ducted gas (42%) followed by not ducted electric (21%) and not ducted gas (19%). Wood burning as a source of heating has become less popular. In 1999 it was used by 6% of ACT households and by March 2005 this had dropped below 3% – a similar trend can be seen nationally. Thirty-four percent of ACT households used electricity for space heating, a decrease of 3% since 2002 (37%). At March 2005 gas was used for space heating by 60% of ACT households, making ACT households the second largest consumers of gas for space heating. Seventy-one percent of Victorian households used gas for space heating.

Most dwellings in the ACT (92%) had at least one cooling system in use in March 2005. Reverse cycle/heat pump systems were the main choice, being used by 59% of households with a cooling system. Twenty-nine percent had an evaporative cooling system whilst 11% had a refrigerated cooling system. Thirty-four percent of cooling systems used in the ACT were ducted, 31% were split systems, 20% were set in a wall/window and 15% were portable in March 2005.

Washing Machines

Of all washing machines used in the ACT in March 2005, 80% were top loading washing machines. Twenty percent were the generally more energy and water efficient front loading washing machines, making ACT households the most prevalent users of front loaders – this was followed by South Australia (17%). Forty percent of ACT households completed an average of three to five loads of washing per week. A further 32% completed less than three loads of washing per week.

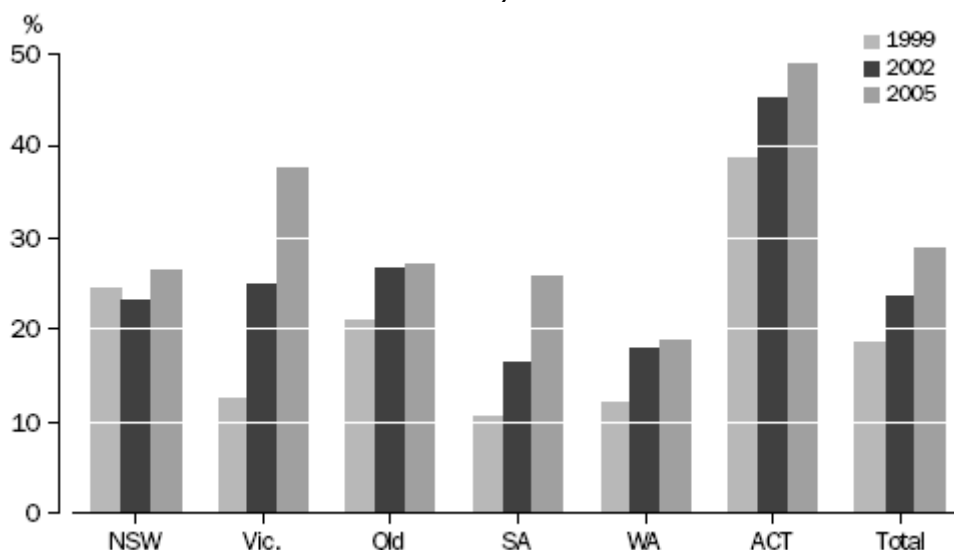
The environmentally sound practice of cold water usage in washing machines is slowly increasing among Australian households. In 1994, 61% used cold water while by 2005 the proportion had risen to 69%. The proportion of ACT households using cold water at March 2005 was 64% – below the national average.

Green Power

Green power schemes require electricity consumers to pay a premium for electricity generated from renewable sources. They have been operating in NSW, Victoria, Queensland, SA, WA and the ACT for the past six years. Accreditation for green power is provided by the National Green Power Accreditation Program (NGPAP). They have been operating in NSW, Victoria, Queensland, SA, WA and the ACT for the past six years. At March 2005, 132,262 domestic Australian households belonged to a green power scheme. More than a quarter (29%) of Australian households reported they were aware of green power schemes.

The ACT had the largest proportion (49%) of households who were aware of green power schemes and furthermore, 23% of ACT households reported that they were willing to pay extra to use green power electricity. The willingness of ACT households to pay extra for green power has dropped 10 percentage points since March 2002. Sixty-four percent of ACT households were unwilling to pay extra for green power, with 13% being undecided. Of those willing to pay extra, 6% reported they were prepared to pay less than \$25, 19% were prepared to pay \$25 to less than \$50 per annum, 35% were prepared to pay \$50 to less than \$100 and 14% prepared to pay \$100 to less than \$150.

GREEN POWER SCHEME, Awareness – 1999:2005



[Previous Page](#)

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